New Nouveau Brunswick CANADA

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Communications New Brunswick

NB Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Day statement (02/12/09)

NB 1227

Dec. 9, 2002

FREDERICTON (CNB) - The following statement was released by New Brunswick Human Rights Commission Chairman Patrick Malcolmson:

"On Dec. 10, Human Rights Day, we celebrate the 54th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is a day to reflect on the progress we have made and the problems that persist and to rededicate ourselves to advance human rights throughout our society.

John Peters Humphrey of Hampton was the main drafter of the Universal Declaration, which was a reaction to the atrocities of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Much has changed since that time.

In 1948, when the declaration was adopted, women routinely lost their jobs when they married or got pregnant, and they were paid less than men for the same work. Natives did not have the right to vote. Even famous black personalities like Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong had to use the back door of the Admiral Beatty Hotel when they came to Saint John. Some golf clubs barred Jews.

These practices continued because there were no legal means to challenge them. That is why, during the 1950s and 1960s, New Brunswick adopted its first laws banning separate pay scales for men and women and discrimination based on race, ancestry and religion. However, these laws were ineffective, largely because no agency was responsible to enforce them and to inform people of their rights and responsibilities. So, in 1967, the Human Rights Act of New Brunswick was adopted, and the Human Rights Commission was created.

In its early years, the commission largely focused on racial and religious discrimination. Sex discrimination was only banned in 1971. Mandatory retirement and sexual harassment became issues in the early 1980s. In the 1990s, sex discrimination and sexual harassment were the most common complaints, but they have now been surpassed by complaints relating to physical or mental disability. One of the main areas where the commission is now focusing is the duty of schools and employers to accommodate disabled persons.

As can be seen, the field of human rights is continually evolving. To keep up with this change, the Human Rights Commission must periodically reassess its programs, services and legislation. That is why we published a discussion paper in October that outlines some of the current issues and discusses some options for updating the Human Rights Act. The discussion paper is on our Web site. We invite the public to send us their written comments by Jan. 31, 2003, or to attend public meetings to be held in various cities in the New Year.

Human Rights Day is also an excellent time to thank those who have worked to improve human rights in New Brunswick. This year, the Human Rights Commission is pleased to present its Human Rights Award to the Multicultural Association of Fredericton Inc. MCAF has been tremendously successful in helping racial and ethnic minorities, especially immigrants and refugees, to fully participate in our society.

The members and staff of the Human Rights Commission would like to wish you a happy Human Rights Day."

02/12/09

MEDIA CONTACTS: Dr. Patrick Malcolmson, Chair, N.B. Human Rights Commission, 506-453-2301; Francis Young, Human Rights Commission, 506-453-2301. Web site: http://www.gnb.ca/hrc-cdp/e/index.htm

02/12/09

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